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The Real *Madrassah* Threat

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Abstract

Pakistani *madāris* are not jihadist factories. The majority of them are simply religious seminaries. They do not pose an international terrorism threat to the Western world, but they do contribute to the instability of Pakistan and have the strong potential to be a destabilizing force in the region, particularly with Afghanistan and India. This report demonstrates the lack of links between *madāris* and terrorism by analyzing recent research on the background and characteristics of terrorists. It then highlights the links between *madāris* and sectarian violence through analysis of research on *madāris* organization, curriculum and political affiliation. Finally, it makes recommendations for both Pakistan and the U.S. to achieve real reform in the *madāris* and Pakistan's educational system as a whole in order to ensure the stability of the country and the region.

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Introduction

Prior to September 11, 2001, few policy makers in the Western World had ever heard of a *madrassah*, let alone understood the role they play in Islam and in the various ethnic or cultural groups in which they reside.[1] However, when the terrorist organization responsible for the attacks on that unforgettable day—Al Qaeda—received asylum from a group that called themselves the Taliban because their core group were students—or *talibs*—at various *madāris*, politicians, military leaders and the press started to take notice.

With their new found notoriety and under the influence of works such as Jeffery Goldberg's piece called, "Inside Jihad U," Robert Kaplan's "The Lawless Frontier," Jessica Stern's "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," and Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban*, *madāris* became a centerpiece of United States' rhetoric against the Taliban and Al Qaeda as a source of terrorism and extremism. The 9/11 Commission Report highlights the *madrassah's* central role as "incubators for violent extremism."[2] The U.S. Secretary of Defense himself made this link with his question in October 2003—"Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the *[madāris]* and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?"[3] While the above mentioned works tied the *madrassah* education to extremist ideology and to fundamental groups such as the Taliban, it is a stretch to link these institutions to international terrorism, particularly on the scale of 9/11. The above works are largely anecdotal—Goldberg's Jihad U was the Haqqania *madrassah* in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former North-West Frontier) Province;[4] Kaplan highlighted the Jamia Binoria *madrassah* in Karachi;[5] Rashid generically described the support *madāris* provided the Taliban after they took Kandahar in 1994;[6] Stern linked the *madrassah* education with guerrilla warfare, but did note that only ten to fifteen percent of Pakistan's *madāris* preach this extremist ideology[7]—more recently published

literature focuses on a more analytical approach in examining these links and developing more sound conclusions as to the risks that *madāris* pose to the United States, Pakistan itself, and the South Asian region.

This monograph examines these more recent works in an effort to dispel the widely accepted Western view of *madāris* as terrorist factories, make solid conclusions about the risk they do pose locally and globally, and finally make policy recommendations to mitigate the risk identified in the previous step. This leads to the conclusion that *madāris* do not pose an international terrorist threat but, along with the overall Pakistan education system, they do pose a destabilizing threat to the state of Pakistan and the regional stability. This destabilizing threat makes *madāris* an important issue for U.S. policy makers and especially the government of Pakistan to address. As such this work makes policy recommendations from both the U.S. and Pakistan perspectives.

This assessment begins by briefly explaining the character and function of a *madrassah* and reviews the history of *madāris* as a whole, and specifically their role in Pakistan. Their evolution helps explain their current impact.

What is a *Madrassah*?

According to Bergen and Pandey, "[*madāris*] vary from country to country or even from town to town. They can be a day or boarding school, a school with a general curriculum, or a purely religious school attached to a mosque."[8] The Arabic word *madrassah* translates to "school" in English, with no specific religious connotation. In Egypt or Lebanon, people use this word to describe any educational institution whether it be state-sponsored, private, secular, or religious.[9] The Arabic phrase d*eeni madrassah* describes a religious school, but western literature does not use this phrase. In non-Arabic speaking countries, especially in South Asian

countries, *madrassah* refers to "Islamic religious schools that provide both free education and oftentimes free boarding and lodging for their students."[10] For the purposes of this monograph the definition of a *madrassah* is an Islamic religious school or seminary.

Brief History

Islamic scholars offer no consensus regarding who established the first *madrassah*, or when and where it happened. Many scholars point to the Nizamiya *madrassah*, founded in Baghdad in the eleventh century A.D., as the precursor most similar to its current manifestation. This *madrassah* provided its students with room and board, in addition to the free Islamic education.[11] The purpose of this institution and its derivatives was "to teach scholastic theology to produce spiritual leaders, and earthly knowledge to produce government servants who would be appointed to various regions of the Islamic empire."[12] The interesting aspect of these *madāris* was their charge to produce government servants in addition to spiritual leaders. This may seem quite the paradox today, especially to the western observer, but at the time of this *madrassah* the spiritual and political leader was one in the same—the caliph. During this period and for a few centuries, Middle Eastern *madāris* produced great innovations in the fields of philosophy, science, and logic, in addition to serving as the institutional bedrock of Islam.[13]

Madāris eventually made their way to the Indian subcontinent. The typical *madrassah* curriculum during the rule of the Moghul Empire consisted of the Qur'an, the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad), Arabic grammar, calligraphy, poetry, alchemy, astronomy, and geography.[14] This does not mean that the *madāris* of the subcontinent had a standard curriculum or core set of textbooks. Each *madrassah* functioned independently. The Emperor did not control them like the Abbasid Caliphs controlled the early *madāris*. This lack of control from

the state, or more appropriately the leading political entity, sets a precedent and sowed the seeds of the current *madrassah* system in Pakistan.

Ironically, a standard *madrassah* curriculum emerged in this more unrestricted environment. This standardization originated not from the command of the Emperor but by Mulla Nizam Uddin Sihalvi of the Farangi Mahall *madrassah* near Lucknow, India in the eighteen century.[15] The curriculum, named *Dars-i-Nizami* after its founder, "emphasized studies based on human reasoning (*maqulat*)…thus there were more books on grammar, logic and philosophy."[16] This curriculum sought to develop not just the future *ulema* (Muslim scholars) but also the lawyers, judges and administrators with "with better-trained minds and better-formed judgment."[17] The *Dars-i-Nizami* curriculum was more aligned in purpose with the original Arab *madāris* in trying to produce candidates for the administration of empires, as well as passing on a formal religious education. As the East India Company exerted more and more power over the subcontinent, culminating in the 1857 India rebellion, this aspect of the curriculum changed.

The next major development relevant to Pakistani *madāris* came from the Deobandi movement. This movement derives its name from the Northwest India town in which this movement's founders built their *Durul Uloom Deoband madrassah*.[18] They established this *madrassah* in 1867 in direct response to both rising British (Western) influence and to the popular exotic practices of South Asian Sufi Islam.[19] Their response emphasized "scriptural studies, 'purification' of the belief system, and outright rejection of imperialism and its values."[20] They captured the religious curriculum of the *Dars-i-Nizami*, but de-emphasized the non-religious studies. This did not represent a message of militancy and jihad, but rather an effort to "harmonize the classical Sharia texts with current realities."[21] An International Crisis Group

report points out that it is during period that *madāris* developed a "paradoxical pattern of resistance to state authority and modernity, couple with a selective use of new subjects, techniques and technology."[22] This represents a shift in a basic purpose of *madāris* from producing graduates to assist in the administration of the state (or empire) and its power, to producing graduates who oppose it. This movement not only put the *madāris* at odds with the state, but also with other sects of Islam. The original Deoband *madrassah* attempted to incorporate training in crafts and trades, in an effort to develop students who could be self-sufficient in surrounding villages and towns. Graduates could then further spread the influence of the movement, as self-employed preachers. However, the effort failed because the "students deem[ed] such work unsuitable."[23] This has important impacts in modern day Pakistan because critics argue that *madāris* fail to produce productive members of the current economy.

Zia's Islamization

Madāris changed little—apart from spreading across India and even into Afghanistan—from the nineteenth century through the formation of the state of Pakistan in 1947 and up until its second military coup in 1977 led by General Zia-ul-Haq. Under Zia's Islamization policies, coupled with the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan starting that same year, Pakistani *madāris* changed dramatically in number, function and importance.

Even prior to Zia's rule, the Pakistani leadership took notice of a change in the *madāris* and particularly their leadership. Former President Ayub Khan recognized around 1960 "there was a time when the [*madāris*] were producing the intellectual elite of the Muslims, but that time was long past and now what they were breeding was 'uncompromising cynicism.'"[24] Zia would try to use this for his political advantage.

Zia sought to solve Pakistan's identity crisis, following the embarrassing defeat in its unsuccessful effort to keep East Pakistan from splitting from the West wing.[25] He also sought to consolidate political power quickly after his coup. Zia imposed an ideological Islamic state upon the population.[26] One of the most telling, and chilling, changes Zia made—particular to the casual western observer—was the change of the official Pakistan Army motto from "Unity, Faith and Discipline" coined by the country's secular founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah to "Faith, Piety, and Jihad" to reflect the importance of Islam in all state matters.[27] The policies that directly affected the *madāris* and the schools system as a whole included the state-run implementation of *zakat*, changes in curriculum, and recognition of *madrassah* degrees.

Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam and describes a religious tithe. Zia made the *zakat* mandatory for all Sunni residents of Pakistan through an automatic deduction from bank accounts. Much of this money served as the initial investment for many of the tens of thousands of *madāris* established during Zia's rule.[28] Zia hoped to gain a broader base of political supporters by indoctrinating them in the same Deobandi Islam that he espoused from the top. If he succeeded, then when he did eventually have elections, he would be able to stay in power. Not only did Zia boost the funding of *madāris*, but at the same time he cut funding to government schools, dealing a death blow to an already challenged government provided service.[29]

The curriculum changes in *madāris* followed Zia's overall Islamization plans. Zia directed the overhaul of text books to "ensure their ideological purity" while removing "un-Islamic" reading material from libraries and schools.[30] In particular, in 1981 the University Grants Commission issued guidance to aspiring authors of Pakistani school textbooks. It directed prospective authors, "to demonstrate that the basis of Pakistan is not founded in racial,

linguistic, or geographical factors, but, rather, in the shared experience of a common religion. To get students to know and appreciate the Ideology of Pakistan and to popularize it with slogans. To guide students towards the ultimate goal of Pakistan—the creation of the completely Islamicized State."[31] This curriculum shifted more focus of young students on their religious studies, much like the original Deobandi movement. In addition, students were taught a particular brand of Islam based on the affiliation of their *madrassah* with a particular political party. S. V. R. Nasr notes that, "The *madāris*' focus is less on training ulema and more on producing sectarian activists, less on spiritual matters and more on sectarian hatred."[32] This completed a dramatic shift in education in Pakistan. Zia's, predecessor Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, wrecked Pakistan's secondary education by nationalizing private schools, now Zia "continued the process by encouraging them to become seminaries" with his emphasis on Islamic-based curriculum.[33] Even when the *madrassah* students were "not indoctrinated with religious extremism, [they] were deficient in subjects such as mathematics and science and were ignorant of basic events in human history.[34]

Finally, in further efforts to solicit political support, Zia had the same University Grants Commission implement a policy to recognize *madāris*, especially those established with the new zakat funds, as degree-awarding institutions.[35] This did two things. It legitimized *madāris* themselves as academic institutions and, maybe more importantly, gave legitimacy to the religious-political groups sponsoring them—increasing the tie between *madrassah* graduates and these groups. The award of the degrees was contingent on the *madrassah* including some of the secular subjects in their curriculum. However, this was hardly enforced, further contributing to the deteriorating education levels in Pakistani schools.

Revolution in Iran

The Iranian revolution in also contributed to the rise of *madāris* in the 1980s. In 1979, Iranians pushed out the western-friendly Shah and forced the state to become an Islamic Republic with the Ayatollah as its Supreme Leader. As keepers of the Shia sect of Islam in a Sunni-dominated Middle East, Iran began to export their revolutionary message to their neighbors and across the Muslim world.[36] Iran established and funded *madāris* in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan that had minority Shia pockets. The Iranian revolution boosted activism in these Shia pockets across the Middle East.[37] The Zia government, already supporting Deobandi *madāris* to support their own political aims, funneled more money into *madāris* to counter the resurgent Iranian/Shia threat.[38] Much of the Pakistani funding for Deobandi *madāris* went to the Baluchistan and Khyber Paktunkhwa provinces, which are the western most provinces in Pakistan. Baluchistan shares a porous eight hundred kilometer border with Iran. One observer commented on the government's effort to thwart Iranian influence with the comment: "if you look at where the most [Sunni *madāris*] were constructed you will realize that they form a wall blocking Iran off from Pakistan."[39]

Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan

On 24 December 1979, Soviet forces crossed the Amu Darya river into Afghanistan to begin a nine year-long occupation of its southern neighbor. Soviet troops numbered some eighty-five thousand in the country and battled numerous rag-tag insurgent groups operating under the name of mujahedeen.[40] For a few years leading up to 1979, Pakistan had its hands in Afghanistan in an effort to secure a stable, friendly neighbor to balance the existential threat India posed on their eastern border.[41] The Soviet invasion served as the perfect cover under which Pakistan could continue to secure a stable ally. The U.S. policy at the time deferred all

decisions regarding internal Afghan politics to Pakistan, as long as they continued to fight the Soviets.[42] This allowed Pakistan to funnel equipment and training to those mujahedeen groups either sympathetic to Pakistan or under its control and influence already. Hasan Abbas captures the impact of supporting the mujahedeen as such,

> The [psychological war] experts of [Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence] coined the slogans 'Islam in Danger' and 'Holy War' as apt motivation for the Afghan resistance against a godless foe, and the CIA could not have improved on this. Quite early on, Zia had already stated to fund the seminaries whose graduates, he expected, would swell the ranks of his supporters. Now many of these foot soldiers of Islam would turn north for a tour of duty in Afghanistan, though most of the fighting was to be done by the indigenous Afghans themselves. And as the United States got Saudi Arabia to match its own contribution to the war effort on a 'dollar for dollar' basis, the seminaries mushroomed and their output increased exponentially, as did the radicalization of Sufi Islam when the puritanical strain of Wahhabism form Saudi Arabia found fertile soil for conversion in the Deobandi seminaries. Thus the seeds of almost all such elements that could interact and grow in to the radical anti-Western Islam we were to see in the new millennium had already been sowed. The only thing missing was anti-Westernism itself, the vital ingredient of the formula. And this seemed improbable at the time because the prevailing sentiment was pro-Western. But Pakistan and the United States would combine to produce this missing ingredient…The Islamization process and active support of the Afghan jihad also laid the foundation of violent sectarianism in Pakistan.[43]

As more money from the U.S., Saudi Arabian, other Person Gulf states and even donations from private Pakistanis poured in, the *madāris* were no longer reliant on the zakat money distributed by the government.[44] This freed the *madāris* from what little control the Pakistani government exerted on them and allowed them to teach and preach the version of Islam best suited for their benefactors.

In 2000, Jessica Stern presented a warning and grim prophecy for Pakistan's support of religious militant groups. "Pakistan must recognize the militant groups for what they are: dangerous gangs whose resources and reach continue to grow, threatening to destabilize the entire region. Pakistan's continued support of religious militant groups suggests that it does not

recognize its own susceptibility to the culture of violence it has helped create. It should think again."

Pakistani *Madāris* Today

The current *madāris* in Pakistan vary widely in their form, function and student body. Furthermore, no one knows exactly how many *madāris* currently operate within the state's borders or how many students attend these institutions. In a 2001 article, P. W. Singer claimed Pakistan was home to forty-five thousand *madāris*.[45] Though the source of this number is unknown, it might include Islamic education schools, called *makatib*, that do not qualify as a seminary due to the lack of room and boarding, or the frequency in which students attend. Even so, Singer's assumed estimate seems to be on the extreme high end. He does state that "10-15% of the schools are affiliated with extremist religious/political groups, who have co-opted education for their own ends."[46] This percentage is more in line with rest of the research on this subject. In 2002, the International Crisis Group (ICG) released a report saying that "about a third of all children in Pakistan in education attend [*madāris*]."[47] ICG reported in 2005 that of 19.9 million Pakistani children in primary schools, an estimated 1.7 million attended *madāris*.[48] Another oft-cited report from the World Bank puts the total *madrassah* enrollment at approximately 475,000, classified as a liberal estimate.[49] This equates to less than one percent of the total primary school age population. Finally, a 2010-11 report from the Pakistan Ministry of Education puts the total number of *madāris* at 12,910 and the total student enrollment at 1.723 million students or four percent of the total school age population.[50]

Each of these "sources" has its fault. The ICG report is based off an interview with Pakistan's Minister of Religious Affairs who provides a range of one million to 1.7 million.[51] This is quite a large difference and certainly doesn't lend itself to a very strong confidence in the

figures themselves. The World Bank report is based on census data pulled from the "1998 Census of Population, the 1991, 1998, and 2001 rounds of the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey (PIHS), and a 2003 census of schooling choice conducted by [their] research team."[52]

The biggest issues with this data are the consistency of definitions and the representation of the whole state. For the census especially, the definition of a *madrassah* student is left up to individual completing the survey. Is it a full-time student who lives at the *madrassah*? It is a part-time student who studies at the *madrassah* after attending a public school? For the representation issue, the survey conducted in 2003 was done only in the Punjab province.[53] The census and PIHS data do not include the Federal Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) along the border of Afghanistan. Only an estimated three percent of Pakistan's entire population lives in the FATA, but a significant number of extremist groups presently conduct an active insurgency against the Islamabad government.[54]

The data coming from the government itself comes with significant caveats. First, the education data is based on data originally collected five years prior to the report. Likewise, the population data is based on estimations from the last census in 1998.[55] Never the less, these reports lead to a conclusion that only a small percentage of the total school age population in Pakistan attends *madāris*. This does not mean the *madāris* do not create a problem. Using the government's own numbers of *madrassah* students and an estimate of 15% of institutions affiliated with extremist groups, the total number of potential new recruits to violent or militant groups would be 258,450. This may not be statistically significant in a population of 181 million but it is larger than the entirety of the U.S. Marine Corps.

While the actual number of *madāris* remains a mystery, the present day organization of *madāris* is well documented. In 2005, the government formed the *Ittehad-e-Tanzimat Madāris-*

e-Diniya (ITMD) to serve as the interface between the government and each of the five *madrassah waqaf*, or school/education boards, in an effort to exert some control over reforming the *madāris*.[56] Each *wafaq* represents a *maslak*—translated literally means way or path—which in turn "designates the particular interpretive tradition and sectarian affiliation of the [*wafaq*]."[57] Five such boards currently operate in Pakistan today representing the Deobandi, Barelvi, Ahl-e-Hadith, and Shia sects of Islam. The fifth one represents the *Jamaat-i-Islami* (JI) which operates more as a political party in Pakistan rather than as a religious school of ides.

The JI *waqaf* is Sunni like the Barelvi, Salafi, and Deobandi sects, with the Deobandi sect providing significant influence early on.[58] Stephen Cohen describes the JI today as standing "apart as an Islamist party, following no particular sect, disciplined, and intellectually attractive, especially to Pakistan's middle class."[59] Besides the absence of sectarianism, the other distinguishing characteristic of JI is their deliberate incorporation of new technology and ideas to further their message.[60] This progressive approach directly influences the curriculum at the JI *madāris*—discussed in further detail in the next section.

The Barelvi is most closely associated with Sufi Islam or "folk Islam" that is popular in rural South Asia. "Barelvis embrace heterodox practices and beliefs such as devotion to shrines, celebration of auspicious date and veneration of graves.[61] Both Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith movements directly oppose the Barelvis and their "mystical Sufi and Indian-Pakistan folk traditions."[62] Both movements seek to purify Islam of this Sufi, and especially Indian influence, and bring people to return to the fundamentals of Islam through devotion to the Qur'an and the *hadith*—the statements and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The difference between the two movements lies in the severity of their doctrine. The original Deobandis still honored Sufi saints while purging some of the exotic practices.[63] *Ahl-e-Hadith* stick to a much more literalist view

of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, not allowing any deviation.[64] The *Ahl-e-Hadith* most closely associate with the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, and benefit from their significant financial resources. Extremist activity also separates the Barelvis from their more active Sunni sect brethren. John Schmidt describes the Barelvis as having a "live-and-let-live approach toward other religious groups," while categorizing the Deobandis as "active proselytizers."[65] These differences in approach helps to explain the Deobandi dominance in the Pakistani *madrassah* market. According to one study, Deobandi *madāris* make up just less than seventy-one percent of the all *madāris* in Pakistan.[66] While any figures associated with *madāris* must be scrutinized, a consistent tread through the research is the dominance of Deobandi *madāris*. Similarly the Deobandis dominate the militant jihadist groups. The sectarian divisions among these organizations create institutional seams between the various groups. These sects "created [*madāris*] to preserve and propagate what, in their view, was the correct interpretation of Islam."[67] These divisions do not, in and of themselves, provide the source of the growing sectarian violence in Pakistan, since these organizations have operated for the last three decades. All but one *waqaf* is more than fifty years old. However, the message that these *madāris* preach and indoctrinate in their impressionable young students makes a big difference for security in Pakistan and the region around.

This general idea of the scale of *madāris* in Pakistan and how they are organized provides the foundation to discuss the doctrine taught in and the forms of their curriculum. Despite interpretation differences between the various sects and their *madāris*, *Dars-i-Nizami* provides the basis of most all *madāris* curriculum.[68] Each sect adapts the traditional *Dars-i-Nizami* curriculum to their ideology by focusing on certain aspects, de-emphasizing or omitting others or adding new subjects. This is truer for the Deobandi, *Ahl e Hadith*, and *Jamaat-i-Islami* sects

than the Barelvi or Shia ones. The Deobandis emphasize the traditional sciences more than the studies on human reasoning of the original *Dars-i-Nizami*. This also resulted in an emphasis on the *hadith*, more so than the originally curriculum prescribed.[69] Similar to Deoband, the *Ahl e Hadith madāris* place emphasis on the *hadith* and the purification of Islam from folk Barelvi traditions.[70] The more fundamental nature of *Ahl e Hadith* and their emphasis on the literal interpretation of the Qur'an distinguished them from the Deobandis. Finally, the *Jamaat-i-Islami madāris* are unique by the way they embrace more perceived western—especially by the other sects—subjects such as politics, economics and history.[71]

This education trains students to confront the ideas of the West through a modern education and an understanding of technology, with an emphasis on "refuting Western culture and intellectual domination."[72] On the importance of these subjects and the usefulness of a strictly religious education, the founder of JI, Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, said "those who choose the theological branch of learning generally keep themselves utterly ignorant of [secular subjects, thereby remaining] incapable of giving any lead to the people regarding modern political problems."[73]

In addition to the curriculum derived from the *Dars-i-Nizami,* Pakistani *madāris* share the practice of *radd*, or refutation, in their curriculum. With *Radd* students learn the is the practice of learning to "counter the theological worldviews of other *maslaks* [schools of theological interpretation], heretical beliefs, and some Western concepts. Students are taught to marshal arguments in defense of their *maslak*."[74] The increasing attention given to *radd* in *madāris* logically supports growing sectarian violence in Pakistan, especially when it combines with an educational approach that emphasizes rote memorization and discourages original thought.

The rote memorization technique used in early *madrassah* education suppresses creativity and original thought. According to Javid Saeed, this restrains modernization in society. He argues,

> In the last several centuries…the distorted Islam propagated and practiced in the Muslim world has been made into a mystery by the religious circles; its effects have been that, given the sacredness attached to this distorted Islam, Muslims in general have been literally afraid to think for themselves in all walks of life. A necessary part of thought is to ask questions. To prevent this from occurring, religious teachers have resorted to all kinds of ruses, a major one of this is to make the distorted Islam an exclusive domain of the *ulema* so that its mystery is maintained.[75]

By "teaching" *madrassah* students the Qur'an through memorization, the *ulema* retain the ability to interpret the writings for their students while the students only know the correct order of the Arabic words and how to pronounce them. This interpretation of the Qur'an is passed down via sermon, but it is based solely on the understanding of the *ulema*, who may or may not know the meaning of the words he teaches to the students. "The seminaries only produce such individuals who assume the role of priests. And because of massive illiteracy in the country, the ideas generated and propagated by them have a powerful but negative effect on the society."[76] This memorization technique exerts significant influence among all sects of Islam. *Ulema* justify this practice based on the belief that correctly pronouncing "each Arabic letter in the Qur'an is worth ten blessings."[77] According to Ali Eteraz, with the Qur'an's "77,701 Arabic words, composed of 323,671 letters," its memorization and correct pronunciation is worth "more than three million blessings."[78] These blessings gain entry into the heaven in the afterlife, not just for the individual but for seventy-two other people. As a result families ensure they have "a few *hafizes* [people who have memorized the entire Qur'an in Arabic] in every generation" to guarantee heaven for the entire family.[79] While Muslims consider this education important for getting into heaven, Hassan Abbas notes that this type of education "creates barriers to modern knowledge,

stifl[es] creativity and creat[es] bigotry," it has also led to a chronic utilization problem for *madrassah* graduates.[80]

The Pakistani education system, particularly the *madāris*, is struggling to produce graduates capable of contributing to Pakistan's work force. Pervez Hoodbhoy, a prominent Pakistani educator, "commented that most students have rarely read newspapers and cannot formulate a coherent argument or manage any significant creative expression. This generation of Pakistanis is intellectually handicapped."[81] More specifically, "the more capable and ambitious" *madāris* graduates "would go on to become Islamic clerics know as mullahs, some of them eventually to open their own mosques. This created a snowball effect that gave rise to ever increasing number of madrassas, a phenomenon that continues."[82] What these *madāris* do produce is a "class of religious lumpen proletariat, unemployable and practically uneducated young men who see religious education as a vehicle for social mobility, but who find traditional avenues clogged and modern ones blocked."[83] This poor quality education and lack of employment opportunities creates a dangerous combustible mix that can quickly flare up into extremism and militancy.

Madāris link to International Terrorism

Despite the post 9-11 moniker of terrorist factories, the various researchers have proved that the *madāris* do not produce international terrorists. Research focused on the characteristics of various high profile terrorists has included their education level. With few exceptions international terrorists did not receive their education in *madāris*. Marc Sageman studied the backgrounds of 172 terrorists as part of what he called the "Global Salafi jihad."[84] This Salafi jihad focuses on restoring Islam to its authentic roots via a strategy of violent jihad fought through the use of terror.[85] The main enemy of the Salafi jihad is the Western powers that

"prevent the establishment of a true Islamic state."[86] Sageman found in his study the majority of these terrorists had above-average educational qualifications. In fact, he found "over 60 percent…had at least some college education, which makes them as a group, more educated than the average person worldwide, and especially more educated than the vast majority of people in the third world."[87] Additionally Sageman discovered only 4% of this group attended *madāris*, and of this 4%, none of them studied in Pakistan but rather in sub-Saharan Africa and the Philippines.[88] These figures show basically no link between Pakistani *madāris* education and international terrorism. Sageman, himself concludes this: "the data refute the notion that global Salafi terrorism comes from madrassa brainwashing."[89] Sageman carries this one step further in his conclusion that based on the available data Western colleges are more likely to produce terrorists than *madāris*.[90]

However Sageman's analysis does not apply to attacks against targets in Pakistan. Sageman distinguishes the Salafi jihad terrorists who target non-Muslim from those who attack other Muslims in Pakistan.[91] Of the 179 terrorists Sageman analyzes, only one of them was from Pakistan or Afghanistan. This shows that Pakistani *madāris* graduates can fill the ranks of the Taliban army, but in general lack the technical skills and general quality education to conduct international terrorist activity.

In another seminal work on the link between *madāris* and terrorism, Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey argue Western politicians painted *madāris* as scapegoats following the 9/11 attacks. However, a careful review of five major anti-Western terrorist attacks and the 79 terrorists who perpetrated the attacks reveals a very minor influence of *madrassah* education.[92] Of the 79 terrorists, "only 11 percent had attended [*madāris*]."[93] Bergen and Pandey argue that the educational requirements "facility with technology" required by large-scale terrorist attacks

cannot come solely from a *madrassah* education.[94] This again speaks to the failings of the *madāris* to produce not only graduates who can compete in the current economy but also graduates with the technical skills and worldly knowledge to successful recruit operators, plan an action, and successful complete a terrorist attack. In this regard, Bergen and Pandey point out that only one *madrassah* student was able to transition from a *madrassah* to a university.[95] Although there could be many reasons for this, Bergen and Pandey point specifically at the educational quality of the *madrassah* which fails to prepare its graduates for further study at university.

Similar to Sageman's argument, Bergan and Pandey do not look specifically at Pakistani *madāris,* but their findings do apply in the same way. This similarity should not come as a surprise, since both pieces overlap in terrorists they evaluate. Both are plagued by the small sample size. They did ignore two major terrorist incidents—U.S.S. Cole in 2000 and the Madrid train bombings in 2004—because of the paucity of information about the terrorists' education available via open source. The Bergan and Pandey research focused on the threat against the Western world which hinders its applicability to Pakistan today. However, the conclusion that Pakistani *madāris* do not create international terrorists does not help Pakistan's neighbors who, along with Pakistan citizens themselves, suffer the most from terrorist and militant activity. Scant available research directly links *madrassah* students with terrorist acts in Afghanistan and India. Security agencies attribute the recent major bombings in Mumbai in 2006 and 2008, as well as the Indian Parliament bombing in 2001, to the Pakistani terrorist group *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT).[96] The lone survivor of the Mumbai attacks detailed his recruitment by LeT. He made no mention of any *madrassah* education, but he did detail his training in LeT camps in Pakistan.[97] The scale of the Mumbai bombings as major terrorist actions dwarf three of the five terrorist

incidents Bergan and Pandey researched. But, because these attacks were not against western targets, the Western analysts have failed to study these terrorists and their education background. These incidents do represent international terrorist incidents because they cross international borders, but the roots of this conflict reside in the sectarian strife between Muslim and Hindu Indians pre-1947. The 1947 British partition set off a powder keg of violence that still boils over to this day.

Similar circumstances surround terrorist activities in Afghanistan, which certainly have their roots in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Balochistan province of Pakistan. This does not mean that these terrorist activities have their roots in *madāris* in the FATA and Balochistan. According to Kaja Borchgrevink, a small number of *madāris* have established links with certain "militant groups and actions" while "the majority of [*madāris*] have neither violent nor an extremist agenda."[98] Christine Fair's survey of 141 militant families in Pakistan supports this notion. Of the 141 militants, less than one quarter (33) ever attended a *madrassah* and the majority of those (27) only attended a *madrassah* for less than five years.[99] Similarly, the same number of militants was recruited from a *madrassah* as were recruited from a public school, which wasn't as many as those recruited from friends, mosques or proselytizing groups.[100] This shows *madāris* may serve as a contributing factor to terrorist and militancy activity but by no means do they constitute the only source. To summarize, it is clear *madāris* do not pose a large terrorist threat to the Western world. Students of the *madāris* do pose a terrorist threat to the region, specifically Afghanistan and India, because these schools serve as one of the potential recruiting sites for terrorist and militant groups. *Madāris* do not constitute the source of this turmoil, but rather an extension of that which is found already exists in the culture and society.

Madāris Link to Sectarian Violence

Continuing with the regional focus, Pakistani *madāris*, as part of the larger Pakistani education system, serve as a destabilizing force in both Pakistan and the region because of their contributions to growing sectarian friction and violence in Pakistan. The very organization of Pakistan *madāris* leads to sectarianism. Most of all *madāris* fall in one of the five boards or *wafaq*, which teach a curriculum to support only its own particular sect of Islam, or political ideology in the case of the JI. *Madrassah* students do not learn to be tolerant of other sects, but rather they learn the arguments to refute these other sect's beliefs and ideas. This practice, in and of itself creates a confrontational and unhealthy rivalry environment between the sects. Qandeel Siddique aptly sums up the relationship between *madāris* and militant sectarianism with these words.

> [*Madāris*] can impart a militant ideology that invariably leads its students along the path of violent jihad. They can impart religiously conservative ideology which, although not directly responsible for leading students to terrorism, can create the conditions (a particularly prejudiced mindset, attitude, and so on) that make [*madrassah*] students more susceptible to extremist groups and their propaganda. A well-established example of that is Radd—refutation of other sects/beliefs—that is common in most *madāris*. With such schooling it is not surprising that [madrassa] students have been often linked with sectarian violence in Pakistan.[101]

Saleem Ali's research also supports this idea of *madāris* fueling sectarianism. He found "sectarian violence is more likely to occur in localities where [*madrassah*] penetration is the highest."[102] With the relatively small penetration of Pakistani *madāris* compared to the other educational systems, sectarianism does not derive solely from the *madāris*.

As previously mentioned, it is not just the Pakistan *madāris* that fuel sectarianism, but the entire education system at large. According to a 2003-2004 report by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, the schools use textbooks from Zia's Islamization efforts that "tell

lies, create hatred, inculcate militancy and much more."[103] The study goes further by placing more blame for "breeding hate, intolerance a distorted worldview, etc." on the government-run schools than *madāris*.[104] Any effort to tamp down the rising sectarian flames must include not just the *madāris* but also the government schools and the private schools as well.

The fact that Pakistani students study with in one of three distinct and independent systems of schools, each with "their own curricula, teaching methods, and examination processes," further fans the sectarian flames.[105] Students in these systems have little contact with other so "students go through their school life (and even adult life) without having the opportunity to engage intellectually across systems. The education sector therefore ends up producing three distinct cohorts from within the Pakistani youth, each cutoff from the other."[106] This isolation from each other breeds what one would expect to find in an imposed hierarchical setting. "A sizeable segment from within the elite [private] schools considers itself superior and more progressive than the rest. [*Madrassah*] students on the other hand blame the elite for having robbed them of necessary resources and causing hardship for the rest of society."[107] Islamists take advantage of the subsequent frustration and alienation when trying to recruit new members to militant organizations.

A survey completed by Tariq Rahman supports the argument that this division among the school systems promotes intolerance. As expected, *madrassah* students were the least tolerant of religious minorities. Government school students showed more tolerance but less than the elite private school students.[108] Rahman found that the elite private school students showed a high degree of intolerance toward "people from the villages, people from the lower socio-economic classes, religious people and, especially, the students and teachers of the [*madāris*]."[109] So the tolerance of religious minorities by these elite students seemed to be an indication of overall

tolerance not seen in the other schools systems, but in fact this merely represented selective tolerance—not really an indication of a tolerant environment at all.

Recommendations

Before exploring U.S. policy recommendations, the U.S. must insist Pakistan take some steps before further investment of any resources. First, regardless of how much foreign aid Pakistan receives, only Pakistan can reform its school systems. They must first demonstrate the commitment to do this through an increase in educational spending relative to their gross domestic product. In the past Pakistan's educational spending has been absurdly low compared to other nuclear states. Pakistan must increase spending followed by a crackdown in corruption in the educational sector. One report claims that the education system only effectively uses 20 to 30 percent of all funds allocated.[110] Given the state of the education system and its importance to Pakistan's competitiveness and future the government must not continue to tolerate this. Additional funds, properly managed and executed will increase both the access and quality of education. The delivery of basic services that all citizens want would provide the Pakistan government with a boost of legitimacy—sorely needed in many parts of the country.

Secondly, Pakistan must officially divorce itself from its policy of jihad as an international relations tool. Pakistan honed this instrument with the help of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia during the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan and continues to exercise it in Kashmir, India and Afghanistan today. The government cannot denounce the militancy within its borders that directly hits its own population while at the same time exporting militancy across its boarders. This works in foreign policy like parenting with "do as I say not as I do." Pakistan must make education a national priority through the financial commitments, cleaning up the corruption associated with education administration, and ceasing the support of militant groups

as a foreign policy tool. Only then should the U.S. make the commitment for additional resources.

When the U.S. is ready to commit time and treasure to Pakistan's education reform, it should pursue whole system reform. It should not try to push for *madāris* reform solely, which critics would perceive as the newest phase of the ill-named "War on Terror"—the "War on *Madāris*." That would only strengthen the resolve of the Islamists, or as Stephen Cohen points out, make martyrs of them.[111] Rather, the U.S. strategy should be one of total education reform in an effort to strengthen the entire system to be able "to support the kind of education that will contribute to a broader view of the world and prepare graduates for real-world employment."[112] The rationale behind this whole system approach is two-fold. First, strengthening the whole system would give parents more viable options when making decisions about where to send their children for school. Having more options, means more competition in the market. This certainly appeals to Western capitalist mindsets, but this standard economic principle proves that competition in the marketplace drives costs down and quality of the product up.

This whole system approach does not mean continuing to write checks for the Pakistan Ministry of Education. They must clean up their corruption, and until then foreign cash will only tempt people to corruption. Rather, targeted investments at the local level would yield the greatest gain and be the most efficient use of resources. This means partnering with local officials or working with and through Non-Government Organizations to focus and tailor efforts specific to local needs. Working directly with local people not only provides the most responsive product, but it also gives the local people a sense of ownership as they feel they contributed to the outcome whether it be new buildings, better quality teachers, new moderate

textbooks, etc. This sense of ownership in the final solution creates a much more lasting product so that the local people will be more likely to continue it on their own.

One successful approach to targeting education reform is the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy's (ICRD) Pakistan *Madrassah* Project which began in 2004. This effort seeks to improve the *madrassah* education, not by pushing modernization, secular or foreign values.[113] Their approach "has been one of helping the [*madāris*] to help themselves. It is an approach that challenges [*madāris*] leaders to live up to their own laudable religious values."[114] This approach appeals to religious values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The ICRD respectfully develops personal relationships with *madrassah* leaders and local leaders and grounds all improvements in cultural and religious norms. In other words, this approach works for improvements by understanding and working within the strategic culture of the targeted people.

So is it working? An independent evaluation conducted by the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice found the project to be effective in introducing critical thinking and problem solving skills, reducing fear and concern over the effect of including science and secular disciplines in their curriculum, introducing conflict resolution skills, promoting religious tolerance and dialogue.[115] An equally important measuring stick can be found in the ICRD's claim that "they are receiving more requests for training than it can accommodate from [*madāris*] across the country."[116] This certainly indicates a positive step and a sign that the *madāris* and the Pakistan education system as a whole can reform.

Conclusion

Shanza Khan and Moeed Yusuf see education as a strategic development priority for Pakistan.

> If Pakistan is to emerge as a stable, moderate polity able to reap dividends from its burgeoning population it must be able to provide the young and future generations both person safety and a decent livelihood. This requires relative peace, an environment for economic growth, and a workforce that can power progress. Vital to such a turnaround is a well-educated population…it is only through high quality, value neutral education that Pakistan can challenge the salience of the Islamist discourse that threatens to radicalize society and drive youth energies towards destructive—often violent—channels.[117]

Pakistani *madāris*, and the education system as a whole currently do not provide that high quality, value-neutral education and as a result, the Islamists increasingly undermine the stability of the country and the region. It is imperative Pakistan make a serious, concerted effort to establish education as a national priority and work to raise the educational level of its entire population. Most importantly, these efforts must be grounded in an academic base and not charged with messages to serve the needs of political agendas.

This reform will not be an easy or short task. If the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is the long war, than Pakistan's education reform will be the <u>really</u> long war. But, it will continue to be drawn out the longer it takes to get started. This is an especially weary prospect, since it took Pakistan a mere 23 years after their founding to hold its first election.

Endnotes

[1] Since *madrassah* is an Arabic word, it has many different spellings in literature to include *madrasa, madrassa* and *madrasah*. For consistency's sake, this work uses *madrassah* as the singular form and *madāris* as the plural. The use of the word in the endnotes and bibliography remains consistent with the text for ease of identifying the source. Husain Haqqani, forward to *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan*, C. Christine Fair. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008, xi.
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[5] Robert D. Kaplan, "The Lawless Frontier," *Atlantic Magazine*, Sep 2000.
[6] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 29.
[7] Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2000): 119.
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[14] Ibid., 40.
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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
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[22] Pakistan, Madrasas, Extremism and the Military, 5.
[23] Barbara Metcalf, "The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," Modern Asian Studies 12, no. 1 (1978), 119.
[24] Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and American's War of Terror* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002) 37.
[25] Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 37.
[26] Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," 118.
[27] Ayesha Jalal, "The Past as the Present," in *Pakistan: Beyond the Crisis State*, ed. Maleeha Lodhi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15.
[28] Stephen Philip Cohen, The Idea of Pakistan (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2004), 183-4.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 21.
[31] Cohen, The Idea of Pakistan, 171.
[32] S.V.R. Nasr, "Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan," in *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation*, ed Christophe Jaffrelot (New York: Zed Books, 2002), 90-91.
[33] Cohen, The Idea of Pakistan, 171.
[34] Ibid., 184.
[35] Saeed Shafqat, "From Official Islam to Islamism: The Rise of Dawat-ur-Irshad and Lashkar-e-Taiba," in *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation*, ed Christophe Jaffrelot (New York: Zed Books, 2002), 139-140.
[36] Ziad Haider, "Ideologically Adrift," in *Pakistan: Beyond the Crisis State*, ed. Maleeha Lodhi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 122.

[37] Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, 113.
[38] Nasr, "Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan," 90.
[39] Ibid., 91.
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[43] Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, 112-113.
[44] Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," 118-119.
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[46] Ibid.
[47] "Pakistan, Madrasas, Extremism and the Military," ii.
[48] Ibid., 2.
[49] Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Tristan Zajonc, *Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look that the Data*. (Washington, DC: World Bank, 8 Feb 2005), 12.
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[51] "Pakistan, Madrasas, Extremism and the Military," 2.
[52] Adnrabi, et. al., *Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan*, 4.
[53] Ibid., 9.
[54] Ibid., 14.
[55] NEMIS-ADPAM, *An Analysis of Educational Indicators of Pakistan*, 3-4.
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[58] Ibid., 59.
[59] Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 166.
[60] Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, 14.
[61] Fair, *The Madrassah Challenge*, 58.
[62] Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 180.
[63] Schmidt, *The Unraveling,* 58.
[64] Ibid.
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[66] Tariq Rahman, "Denizens of Alien Worlds: A survey of Students and teachers at Pakistan's Udru and English Language-medium schools, and Madrassas," *Contemporary South Asia* 13, No. 3 (Sep 2004), 311.
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[69] Rahman, "The Madrassa and the State."
[70] Fair*, The Madrassah Challenge*, 59.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Rahman, "The Madrassa and the State."
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[74] Fair, *The Madrassah Challenge*, 56.
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[81] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 234.
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[83] Cohen, *Idea of Pakistan*, Pg 182.
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[91] Ibid., 1.
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[93] Ibid., 118.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 123.
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[102] Ibid., 28.
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[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 259.
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[109] Ibid.
[110] Kahn and Yusuf, "Education as a Strategic Imperative," 256-7.
[111] Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 312.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Johnston, *Madrasa Enhancement and Global Security*, 33.
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